

AMERICANS ARE STUBBORNLY UNMOVED BY DEATH

(By Robin Givhan)

The scene looked heartbreakingly familiar: the rumble of tactical vehicles, the swarm of law enforcement officers, the long ribbons of yellow police tape and the eyewitness descriptions thick with residual terror. Monday evening's deadly shooting in Boulder, Colo., which resulted in the deaths of 10 people, including a police officer, was the second mass shooting in a week.

A dreadful normalcy has returned. Muscle memory demands that we lament it—even as all evidence suggests that many of us are unmoved by death. It doesn't cause behavior to change. It doesn't shake people from their moorings at the center of their own universe. Death is not a deterrent.

In the days after a mass shooting, the nation mourns and those who died are named. The hearts of our elected officials have been broken so many times that surely they must be in shards by now. The flags are lowered to half-staff. And the president speaks. Joe Biden, a man who is expert at consoling, did the best that he could to say something true that did not sound like a cliché.

"I even hate to say it because we're saying it so often: My heart goes out. Our hearts go out for the survivors, the—who had to—had to flee for their lives and who hid, terrified, unsure if they would ever see their families again, their friends again," Biden said Tuesday afternoon from the State Dining Room. "The consequences of all this are deeper than I suspect we know. By that, I mean the mental consequences—a feeling of—anyway, it just—we've been through too many of these."

The images from these shootings can be gut-wrenching. In video and still images, people see shellshocked survivors pouring out of the school, the night club and, this time, the grocery store. There's blood in these images, sometimes even the blurred image of one of the deceased. There's nothing sanitized about them. The shooting may happen behind closed doors, but the death is in the open. The terror rises off the survivors like a stench; the sound of fear reverberates.

And still the deaths don't spur action to make the guns harder to get, to make the guns less efficient. The president, some politicians and many activists cry out for "common sense" gun laws to stop the senseless death even as it seems that they are pleading with a country that's engaged in a completely different kind of calculation.

Increasingly it seems that we simply do not care about the other person, that other family, someone else's child. The self is everything. It's freedom and liberty, whims and desires. Community doesn't extend beyond one's front door. Everything else is someone else's concern.

Studies have shown that the human brain can lose the capacity to process death, to absorb the meaning of it, when the numbers of the dead begin to reach staggering levels. We have been told that the heart can go numb in response to such enormity. This is one of the explanations for why people have continued to engage in risky behavior during the coronavirus pandemic even as it has become ever clearer how best to protect our fellow Americans. The end is on the horizon, and if people simply wear a mask, social distance and persevere with patience, we might get there—not all of us, sadly, but most of us.

Yet unmasked revelers crowded onto the streets of Miami Beach. The very real possibility of death has not been a deterrent. The community didn't matter as these partyers and tourists ostensibly shot a different kind of deadly slug into the Florida air.

More than 544,000 deaths in the United States due to the coronavirus have not sent

everyone scurrying to protect their neighbor. To follow common sense recommendations. To center the community instead of the individual.

If that number is too big for people to grapple with, what is the right number? What number is small enough that each death touches the heart and therefore motivates people to act, to be better? Is it 58—the number of people a man killed at a Las Vegas country music festival in 2017? Is it 49—the number killed in a shooting at Orlando's Pulse nightclub in 2016? Or perhaps the motivating number is nine, which accounts for those who were fatally shot in Charleston during a prayer meeting. Is it eight—the number who were killed in Georgia just last week? It surely can't be one because there are singular deadly shootings in communities all too often and still nothing happens. Nothing.

We have not gone numb to death. To "go numb" suggests that once there was feeling, once there was sensitivity. When was that? Perhaps it was back in 1968 when, after the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, Congress passed gun laws that formed the basis of federal regulation that has been regularly eroded and only occasionally strengthened. We haven't cared for a long time. Not when the dying were schoolchildren, people in the midst of prayer or contented folks just living quiet lives.

HARRIS'S SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH

Crowds gather in the street while a speaker blasts music an hour past curfew in Miami Beach on Sunday. (Daniel A. Varela/Miami Herald/AP)

Today, some in this country argue against gun laws with a ferocity that moves beyond a right to hunt rabbits, or defend oneself against an assailant or one's property in the face of an intruder. We refuse to relinquish the delusion that 21st-century America is a frontier town in which gunplay is a form of justice.

Many insist that the very real possibility of mass deaths does not outweigh a personal inconvenience or the setting aside of a myth. Give up large-capacity magazines. Wear a mask. These deaths matter.

We are not numb to death. We stubbornly, selfishly dismiss it. We shake it off. But there is always an assault that has the capacity to bring an individual low. Some bracing gut punch that stings and startles. The pain might finally register in a way that is deep and lasting. And that person begins to feel something. But that may require death coming directly to their own doorstep, since that's the only one that, for many of us, seems to matter.

Correction: A previous version of this article misstated the year of the shooting at a Las Vegas country music festival. It was in 2017, not 2018.

HONORING ELIZABETH ANN HOFFMAN

HON. MIKE THOMPSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 26, 2021

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Elizabeth Ann Hoffman, whom I have named the 2021 Woman of the Year in Contra Costa County, California. Woman of the Year recognizes women who have made important contributions to California's 5th Congressional District in Arts and Culture, Professional Achievement,

Entrepreneurship and Innovation or Community Service.

A California native born in San Leandro and raised in Benicia, Ms. Hoffman attended Sonoma State University for her undergraduate degree and San Jose State University for her graduate education in Social Services. A member of Food Bank of Contra Costa and the Vallejo Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Hoffman has been an active member of our community for many years.

Most notably, Ms. Hoffman serves as the Executive Director for Rebuilding Together Solano County (RTSC), working diligently to improve the lives of low-income families, veterans, seniors, and disabled members of our community. Throughout the years, Ms. Hoffman's contributions to RTSC have resulted in the rehabilitation of over 40 low-income homes and 52 community centers. She has also impressively amassed over 12,000 volunteers for the organization, expanding resources to better the lives of those in need.

Her exceptional commitment to our community has not gone unrecognized. Ms. Hoffman has received numerous public health service awards, including PG&E's Environmental Remediation Sibley Award and the American Red Cross' Community Service Hero Award.

Madam Speaker, Ms. Hoffman has proven herself to be a true asset to the groups she serves. Our community is immeasurably better for all of Ms. Hoffman's contributions and it is therefore fitting and proper that we honor her here today as Contra Costa County's 2021 Woman of the Year.

KENT MCELHATTAN

HON. MICHAEL F. DOYLE

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 26, 2021

Mr. MICHAEL F. DOYLE of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Kent McElhatten, a constituent who has dedicated his life and career to safety.

Earlier this month, the National Safety Council (NSC) honored Mr. McElhatten with the prestigious Flame of Life award at the 2020NE Virtual Safety Congress and Expo. This honor has only been given four times in the 107-year history of the National Safety Council, as it is reserved for the most outstanding individuals who have dedicated themselves to building safer workplaces and communities. Mr. McElhatten is a long-time partner to the National Safety Council. He served on the NSC Board of Directors for a decade, including a stint as chairman from 2010 until 2013.

A founder of the Pittsburgh-based Industrial Scientific, Kent worked to build products that protect workers from hazardous conditions around the world. Industrial Scientific specializes in producing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), some of which has become vital to all of us during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under his leadership, Industrial Scientific was a founding member of the Campbell Institute, which is focused on solving global environmental, health, and safety challenges through research and innovation.

Now CEO and co-founder of another Pittsburgh-based company, Discovery Robotics, Mr. McElhatten continues to strive for worker